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ABSTRACT

While foreign language instruction for elementary school children is gaining attention, poor articulation is a problem that has become more complex because of the variety of foreign language program models being developed. Five main types are in use: total immersion, partial immersion, foreign languages in the elementary school (FLES), content-enriched FLES, and foreign language experience or exploratory (FLEX). As different as the models are, one principle applies to all: no elementary school foreign language program graduate should be placed with beginners in middle or junior high school. However, each of the program models has different implications for the subsequent curriculum. Successful articulation between elementary and secondary schools requires ongoing communication and close cooperation among language teachers at all levels. Elementary school foreign language programs must be considered part of the total foreign language program, not a mere prelude unrelated to the goals and activities of the secondary curriculum. The elementary school language teacher will have to be able to describe the communicative and cultural outcomes of instruction very specifically. Articulation will be smooth only if students are achieving predictable outcomes consistent across grade levels. Successful elementary programs will necessitate secondary curriculum changes and careful placement procedures. (MSE)

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1 Articulation for Elementary School Foreign Language Programs: Challenges and Opportunities

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Foreign language instruction for elementary school children is making news. Publishers are considering initiatives in foreign languages for children, and some have actually published new materials. National groups are making declarations of support for early foreign language programs. The Center for Applied Linguistics has issued a new national profile of elementary school programs (Rhodes and Oxford, 5). Networking sessions for elementary school foreign languages fill conference rooms to overflowing, and the National Network for Early Language Learning provides new opportunities for communication among all those interested in foreign languages for children. The first issue of *FLES News*, the newsletter for this interest group, had to be reprinted after its initial 2,000 copies were exhausted. Language-specific professional organizations such as AATF, AATG, and AATSP acknowledge the new interest in languages at the elementary school level by means of special committees, programs, and articles in journals.

Many foreign language teachers who experienced the comparable national enthusiasm for FLES (Foreign Languages in the Elementary

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School) in the 1960s regard the boom times which seem to be approaching with mixed feelings. On the one hand, there is every reason to believe that elementary school foreign language programs of the 1980s and 1990s can benefit from insights about second language instruction that have revitalized the profession and contributed to a communicative surge in the classroom. The resources for developing strong programs that provide meaningful language experiences for children have never been more abundant or more promising. Yet there also seems to be a disturbing potential for making some of the same mistakes that led to general dissatisfaction with the FLES programs of the 1960s and to their subsequent rapid decline. Insufficient planning, inappropriate goals, unrealistic promises, lack of materials, unqualified teachers, and inadequate time allotments will all prevent an elementary school program from achieving lasting success. Even with other factors well in place, the issue of articulation, particularly the continuity with language programs beyond the elementary school, stands as one of the most important challenges for planners who are committed to quality programs and significant outcomes for elementary school children.

Horror stories about poor articulation abound. Children who have spent several years learning subject content by means of a foreign language may be placed into a beginning class in grade 7 and drilled on colors, numbers, and subject-verb agreement until they decide their time is better spent in study hall or in another elective. Children who can communicate successfully with a native speaker or plan fluent skits expressing wry insights about the school environment may be "unacceptable" in a second-year high school language program because they have little experience in grammar analysis; they are then placed into a first-year class and provided with few opportunities for creative language use. At times secondary school teachers give students the impression that their language learning in the elementary school was somehow frivolous and deficient and that serious language learning is approached so differently as to require starting over and ignoring or correcting the language already acquired. Poor articulation not only deprives students of many of the benefits of long-term language study, it may even discourage them to

the point where they discontinue language study entirely. Lack of articulation undermines confidence in the elementary school foreign language program, and if uncorrected, often leads to loss of the program itself.

Elementary School Foreign Language Program Models

The articulation challenge, already a problem in the 1960s, has become more complex because of the variety of foreign language program models currently being developed in American elementary schools. Five main program types are now reported in schools across the country, each resulting in different levels of language achievement and requiring different considerations in the development of continuation programs. The first of these, *total immersion*, is both the newest and the most intensive option for elementary school foreign language learning. Children who are native speakers of English learn all school subject content in a foreign language, usually beginning in kindergarten or grade 1; initial reading instruction takes place in the foreign language. Limited instruction in English usually begins in grade 2 or 3, increasing gradually until by grade 6 as much as 50 percent of the school day may be taught in the English language. Many immersion programs continue to spend 60 percent or more of the day in the foreign language through grade 6. Children who have completed an immersion program attain functional fluency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing the foreign language. In addition, their achievement in all subject areas, including English language arts, is as good as or better than that of children in English-only programs. First developed for French in St. Lambert, Quebec, in 1965, the immersion model was adopted for a Spanish program in Culver City, California, in 1971. Since that time full or partial immersion has spread to thirty locations in the United States, enrolling approximately 10,000 students.

Partial immersion, a variation of the immersion model found in both United States and Canada, is similar to total immersion in that a portion of the curriculum is taught exclusively in the target language, usually no less than half the school day. Initial reading instruction takes place either in English or simultaneously in English and the foreign language. Students in partial immersion programs also achieve functional proficiency

in the foreign language, although to a lesser extent than is possible in total immersion, and they master subject content and English language arts skills as well.

FLES programs, the most common elementary school program in the 1960s, currently represent nearly half of all U.S. foreign language programs at this level (Rhodes and Oxford, 5). Classes meet for an hour or less per day, typically twenty to thirty minutes, and usually focus on developing listening and speaking proficiency, understanding and appreciation of the foreign culture, and, to a limited degree, reading and writing skills. The degree of proficiency attained is directly proportional to the amount of time available and the intensity of the language experience. While total and partial immersion students achieve a much higher degree of functional fluency, children who have had several years of a carefully designed FLES program that allows for at least thirty minutes daily of meaningful language experience often acquire good communication skills and can use the language to express their own ideas.

Some FLES programs are augmented with one or more subject content classes taught in the target language, thus increasing the child's daily exposure to the target language. This model, known as *content-enriched FLES*, provides children with additional communication opportunities and results in improved fluency and greater overall foreign language proficiency. Typical subjects for content-enriched FLES include physical education, music, art, mathematics, social studies, and science.

Of all the program models currently being used in American schools, the *FLEX program* (Foreign Language Experience or Foreign Language Exploratory) has the most limited goals. Primarily designed to be an introduction to the learning of languages and to foreign cultures, FLEX programs typically last from six weeks to a year. They often give children exposure to the languages available to them in the secondary school, so that they can make decisions based on experience when choosing electives in grade 7 or later. In a FLEX classroom more time may be spent learning about languages and cultures than learning the language. Sometimes English is the primary language of instruction, although a few FLEX programs are intended to give a short-term, intensive foreign language experience.

Implications of Program Model for Articulation Design

As different as each of the above models may be from one another, one principle clearly applies to all: *No graduate of an elementary school foreign language program should be placed with beginners in the middle or junior high school.* Even children with experience in a FLEX program, especially one that emphasizes development of language skills, have a background to build on and will not be well served by a program that fails to take earlier experiences into account. Each of the program models has different implications for the programs that follow it in the curriculum, however.

Full and partial immersion programs produce students with the most advanced language skills, and these students bring both the greatest resources and the highest expectations to the secondary school. The most successful programs for immersion students will continue to provide subject content courses taught in the target language, together with language arts classes designed to help students extend and refine their foreign language fluency.

FLES students can arrive in the secondary school with a wide range of language skills, depending on the duration and intensity of their elementary school program and the total number of hours they have spent in a foreign language classroom. The child who has German instruction for thirty to forty minutes per day, five days per week beginning in kindergarten will clearly enter junior high school with language skills that are far superior to those of a child who has had German FLES for fifteen minutes per day, four days per week beginning in grade 4. A successful secondary school foreign language program will begin at the language level FLES students have attained and build toward increasing proficiency in both oral and written communication.

Children who have had several years of experience with content-enriched FLES will profit from continued opportunity to learn subject content in the foreign language at the secondary school level, in addition to foreign language classes that help them build on the language proficiency attained in the elementary school.

FLEX students will be able to make the most of their elementary school experience if they have the opportunity to choose a foreign language immediately upon entry into the middle school or junior high

school and then to continue it throughout their secondary school program. Their first course should build on concepts already introduced in the FLEX program, reviewing them but not introducing them as if they were entirely new material.

Resources Available for Achieving Articulation

Successful articulation between elementary and secondary schools requires ongoing communication and close cooperation among all foreign language teachers at all levels. Elementary school foreign languages must be regarded as a part of the total foreign language program, not as a mere "prelude" that is so different in character as to be unrelated to the goals and activities of the subsequent curriculum. Several developments in foreign language teaching in the past ten years encourage the belief that it is more likely for students to attain the required levels of communication and cooperation now than it was in the 1960s.

First, the growing emphasis on communication as an organizing principle for curriculum is much more compatible with the goals and outcomes of elementary school foreign language programs than was the earlier grammar emphasis, evident even in the audio-lingual method. Such popular classroom strategies as Total Physical Response (Asher, 2) and Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell, 4) incorporate ideas and activities that have long been standard practice in elementary school foreign language teaching. Elementary school teachers have always found ways to incorporate physical involvement, use concrete objects and visuals, encourage personal associations, and set language learning in a meaningful here-and-now context. As all foreign language teachers continue to develop programs that are more communicative, secondary school teachers will find it easier to value the skills of elementary school graduates and to build on them, rather than seeking to replace them with skills of grammatical analysis. Teachers at all levels may be learning to communicate in the same professional language and to work with similar professional values.

In the movement toward greater communication among school levels, the elementary school foreign language teacher will be required to

describe both the communicative and the cultural outcomes of instruction in very specific terms. A useful tool for developing these descriptions may be found in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (1), developed in part to provide a common vocabulary for student performance of language skills. These scales were adapted for secondary school students from standards originally designed to measure the proficiency of motivated adults preparing for government service in intensive language programs. Many elementary school teachers have found that the guidelines, in their present form, are difficult to apply directly to their programs. Yet the guidelines have considerable value as a starting point for dialogue with teachers at other levels. The principle of purposeful language use is applicable to all levels of teaching, even if many of the functions and much of the content described in the guidelines are not well matched with the interests and needs of children. Teachers in districts that have established good articulation between elementary and secondary school foreign language programs may be able to provide leadership in developing an adaptation of the proficiency guidelines for the elementary and middle school levels.

One more development that may have considerable implications for foreign language program articulation is a growing appreciation for the power of subject-content instruction. The results evident in immersion programs provide reassurance that information can be successfully taught in a foreign language, to the benefit of foreign language proficiency and with no sacrifice of the subject matter. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (3) cite research that supports the teaching of subject content in the target language at every academic level. Graduates of FLES programs in which adequate levels of language proficiency are achieved, as well as students from content-enriched FLES programs, could clearly benefit from subject-content instruction at the middle school level, in addition to their more traditional foreign language courses. A program incorporating subject-content instruction would increase student contact with the target language, provide students with additional opportunities for communicative use of language, and significantly extend student vocabulary and language experience. Perhaps of even greater importance, the introduction of subject-content instruction at the middle school for students with adequate preparation could alleviate severe

scheduling problems that disrupt foreign language sequences for many students in middle and junior high school.

Horizontal Articulation

Articulation from elementary to secondary school foreign language classrooms can take place smoothly only if children moving through the elementary school programs are achieving predictable outcomes that are consistent across grade levels. The larger the program and the greater the number of teachers involved, the more essential—and difficult—this consistency becomes. Some large districts may implement several different program models, e.g., total immersion, content-enriched FLES, and FLES. Each program model must maintain both an internal, horizontal consistency and a vertical, continuous articulation through the elementary school and into the secondary school.

FLEX programs at the elementary school level must be concerned with horizontal articulation. Children in each elementary school must have similar experiences with each language if middle school teachers are expected to build on what was learned in FLEX. In programs that provide experiences in several languages, each experience should not simply be a translation of the preceding one. Each language should address different sets of concepts as well as different cultural topics. Basic vocabulary that must be repeated from language to language might be contrasted with other languages the children have learned.

Horizontal articulation, like vertical articulation, requires joint planning, regular communication, and continuous cooperation on the part of everyone involved in the program. Teachers who are working with a well-designed curriculum, jointly developed objectives, and a common understanding of the goals of the program will be most successful in achieving program consistency.

Impact of Elementary School Foreign Languages on Secondary School Programs

The development of successful elementary school foreign language programs will necessitate significant changes in secondary school curriculum and planning; the more intensive the elementary school model

is, the greater the changes that are required. These changes affect all subsequent program levels, beginning in the middle and junior high school. Only students who have had no previous foreign language experience are likely to profit from the typical exploratory experience now popular in many middle schools, although students who have had instruction in only one of several available languages may benefit from an introduction to the others. Several program tracks must be developed for middle schools to meet the needs of students who have had different amounts of elementary school foreign language instruction, in addition to the beginning programs for students who are new to foreign languages or who are beginning a third language. Entirely new programs will be called for in both junior and senior high schools to challenge students who have developed considerable fluency in the target language and are able to use it to learn subject content. Advanced Placement courses and the International Baccalaureate curriculum, now being used in some school districts, are appropriate for the needs and interests of a certain number of students, primarily those who are college bound. Other students may find courses in contemporary culture, politics and world affairs, or the sciences to be more meaningful.

Of course, students differ not only in their goals for foreign language learning and in amount of language background, but also in their level of achievement. The longer the language sequence, the greater the range of skills presented by students at each program level is likely to be. Several school districts have begun the difficult and essential task of developing placement procedures for graduates of elementary school foreign language programs. Concern for appropriate placement requires both accurate description of course goals and outcomes at each program level and evaluation procedures that accurately measure student achievement and proficiency. Successful placement programs make it possible for students to achieve steady growth in language skills, thus making it much more likely that they will continue language study long enough to gain functional fluency in at least one foreign language. Only a cooperative effort among language teachers at all levels can yield this kind of quality placement program.

Conclusion

The 1980s close as the 1960s began, with a renewed commitment to, and enthusiasm for, elementary school foreign language instruction. A number of resources now available to the foreign language profession can help avoid the isolation of the elementary school, one of the major causes of the decline of FLES programs twenty years ago. As we capitalize on the common goals of communicative language teaching, take advantage of the "common metric" of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, adapt them to elementary school outcomes, and explore together the potential of content-based language teaching, we can create language programs that encourage continued student growth and language development. The development of well-articulated, sequential foreign language programs beginning in the elementary school will require dedication and hard work on the part of teachers at every level. The consequence of failure may well be that foreign languages do not soon again receive the opportunity for a place in the elementary school. The reward for success can be a secure place for foreign languages in the curriculum and an increasing number of foreign language speakers in American society.

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